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"For Christ and the Church."



"THE CONSECRATION MEETING"

BY

REV. F. M. DEWEY, M.A.

"THE PLEDGE"

BY

GEO. R. LIGNTHALL, B.C.L.

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I. Its object. In the Model Constitution, under article VII., we read: "Once each month an experience or consecration meeting shall be held, at which each active member shall speak concerning his progress in the Christian life;" also, "at each experience or consecration meeting the roll shall be called, and the response of the active members who are present shall be considered as a renewed expression of allegiance to Christ."

The object of this meeting, thus set forth, is two-fold.

1. The renewal of our consecration to Christ. Such an object is quite scriptural, and must be fruitful of good results if done in a right spirit. We cannot be reminded too often of the fact that we are Christ's—that He hath redeemed us—that we have voluntarily taken Him to be our personal Lord and Saviour, and that the vows of the Lord are upon us. It is well also to renew these vows; to pledge ourselves anew to fidelity to our Master.

2. To speak of progress in our Christian life. It is a constant reminder that the Christian life is a growing life. We are in danger of forgetting this, and once a month is not too often to be solemnly reminded of the fact. It is well to be made to put the question pointedly to one's self: Am I growing in the Christian life? Have I made any progress during the last month? Such an enquiry will turn the gaze inward; cause us to look at ourselves; become better acquainted with our own characters;

discover their weak points and know if we are really fulfilling the end of our being. By discovering our mistakes and the weak parts of our character, we are able to remedy defects and do better in the future, and profiting by past experiences make the next month better than the last.

II. How should the consecration meeting be conducted ?

1. The roll call ; when should this take place ? Practice seems to differ. With some it is at the close of the meeting and is a part by itself. With others it is during the meeting, and when the members answer their names they are also expected to speak of their religious life during the past month. The latter seems the better way. It saves time and secures to each member an opportunity of speaking. It need not be a stiff, formal thing, after a few names are called a hymn may be sung or a prayer offered, and thus the sameness of the meeting will be broken. The person presiding can do much by a few pointed remarks thrown in from time to time to make the meeting fresh and lively.

2. Speaking of the religious life of the past month. This is expected of every member ; all should strive to do it. The mere reading of a passage of Scripture may be very impressive and helpful at times, but too often it is a mere refuge to which the idle, careless, member flees to escape a duty which may be a little difficult. All should try to speak of their experience in their own words. It is a duty we owe to our Master and to each other. A few words thus spoken may be of untold good to others present. They may be fighting the same battles we have won, and it may be a great stimulus and encouragement to them to know how we gained the victory. If members are timid and do not

feel able to speak with ease they should write out carefully what they wish to say and read it. They would soon gain confidence by so doing, and would speak with ease after a few meetings. What we speak about should be genuine—our own Christian experience and not something prepared for the occasion. We should speak of what the Lord hath done for our souls ; words coming directly from the heart and telling of our own experiences will go right to the hearts of others and do them good. This meeting should be prepared for with much care ; we should think of it during the whole month ; pray over it and come prepared to do our share to make it the best possible.

The subject upon which we are expected to speak is, progress in the Christian life—the progress we have made during the past month. That is a very broad subject. The Christian life implies a great deal ; it may be analyzed into many different parts. Because the subject is so broad there is a great indefiniteness about many Consecration meetings. Some speak of the same phase of life at each meeting and many really never touch upon the subject at all. Instead of always leaving the whole subject open, might it not be well to limit each meeting to one particular department ?

(a) The reading of Scripture is a very important part of the Christian life, we pledge ourselves to do this every day. Could we not very profitably take that up at one meeting and let each member honestly tell what he or she has been doing with the Bible during the past month ? How much have I read ? What has been my plan of reading ? What have I learned ? What special help have I got in my Christian life from my study of God's Word ? What a profitable hour would the society have

if all would tell their experience in this one department ! What blessed results might flow from such witness-bearing !

(b) Prayer is another important element in the Christian life. Every Christian must pray, we pledge ourselves to do so daily. This is a department of life in which we should be growing ; every month should mark progress. There is much to learn here, and we can greatly help one another by a free exchange of thoughts and experiences. The time at our disposal on one evening might very profitably be spent in telling of our personal experience in the closet. What is my practice in secret prayer ? Have I any special plan or system ? What difficulties have I met, and how were they overcome ? What special help have I received in prayer ? What progress am I making ? An hour spent in earnest conversation upon this subject of such vital importance would raise us to a higher plane and would long remain fresh in our memories as a helpful influence in life.

(c) Faith is a most essential element in the Christian life ; without it such life is impossible. It is a growing thing, and each month should mark progress in its development. How seldom do we speak with each other regarding our personal faith ! We should do so. At our Consecration meetings we should often devote the hour to this one subject. Have I living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ? How has it been tried during the past month ? Did it bear the test or did it fail ? What victories have I won through faith ? Has my faith grown ? Such a free, trustful exchange of experiences would be of great help to all, and the Christian life of the whole society would be seen to grow under its refreshing, stimulating influence.

We might in this way take up many depart-

ments of the Christian life. One meeting might be devoted to temptations ; another to besetting sins ; another to failures ; and another to encouragements in the Christian life ; another to obedience to Christ ; another to the joys, and another to the hopes, of the believer.

By thus making the meeting more definite we would concentrate our thoughts and prayers upon one department of our Christian life and would find the results more satisfactory than by trying to go over the whole field. A very impressive way of closing the meeting is to rise and read the Pledge in unison, sing "Blest be the tie that binds," and repeat the Society's benediction.

I am persuaded that the Consecration meeting is capable of doing a great deal of good. But to get the blessing you must pay the price. Every member must look forward to it with anxious expectation, must pray earnestly for a blessing upon it, must make careful preparation to take part and do everything possible to make it a bright profitable meeting. We cannot have even a good Consecration meeting without hard work.



THE PLEDGE—ITS NECESSITY AND BENEFITS, ESPECIALLY IN RE- LATION TO THE CONSECRA- TION MEETING.

—
BY GEORGE R. LIDTHALL, MONTREAL.

In order to get at our subject properly we should commence at the beginning, dig right down to the very roots of the matter and see whether a pledge—or vow as it is scripturally termed—is a necessity or justifiable at all or not.

For the sake of arguing from a definite standpoint, I will assert that they are authorised, necessary, and justifiable.

God ordained vows and approves of them. Take, for instance—marriage. The parties contracting it vow to observe its inviolable ties—the one vows to love, cherish, and protect, and the other vows to love, honor, and obey. This was instituted by God's command in Genesis II., 21-25, and commended to us by Christ, and also in many other places throughout the Scripture.

Then there are the vows taken at Baptism, and those by Christians on joining the Church, by which they promise to take the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master, obey His commands as revealed to them, attend the stated means of grace, etc. And what Christian ever partakes of the Lord's Supper in a true and earnest spirit without pledging anew his faith and love to his Master, and promising Him again to follow His will?

Now if God disapproved of vows, He would—instead of giving laws concerning them—either ignore them entirely, in which case they

would only be interpreted as the invention of man, or He would have expressed His disapproval of them in some way more or less emphatic. As a matter of fact, however, we find divine laws—God's distinct and exact enactments concerning them. Take for instance the vow of the Nazarite—nearly the whole of the sixth chapter of Numbers is devoted to it, and in the eighth verse of which God says, "All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord." If a vow is displeasing to God He certainly would not have made the subject of it holy to Himself. In fact, our Heavenly Father gave special blessings to those who kept those vows. We have many examples: Samson, who only lost his power when he violated his vow; John the Baptist (Luke i. 15); Samuel (I Sam. i. 11), etc.

I think that I have now well established that God ordained that we should take vows—good vows I mean—for I will not now comment upon questionable or bad vows, for they have nothing to do with our subject—that He justifies and approves of them, and through them confers blessings on us.

By ordaining them God recognised the necessity of vows to human beings, therefore they are justifiable and beneficial, for God never gives us any ordinance but for our good and His glory.

The performance of the vow follows the taking of it, that we must not neglect, for in Numbers xxx. and 2, it is written, "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." We know that we have a righteous, terrible, and just God watching over our every action in regard to our vow; but we also know that He is a God of love and mercy, who will look not upon our weak and imperfect accomplishment of our promises but upon the spirit in which it is done. He

knows our abilities to do and the disadvantages and temptations under which we may be laboring at the time, and will accept the conscientious effort in the place of, and for the performance to the letter. In fact He will always be standing in the breach ready to make up all that we fail to do after we have done our best.

It is written in Eccles. v. and 5. "Better is it that thou shouldst not vow than that thou shouldst vow and not pay." It is not—"Better not to vow at all." God never meant that interpretation, but what He does mean is that we shall not make empty vows that we have no intention of keeping, neither should we be careless or neglectful of a vow once taken. But if we make them sincerely we shall receive the necessary divine help to perform, for Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Jesus says, "Ye shall neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father," that is not by mere forms and traditions, for "God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The performance of a vow to God is a part—an important part—of our worship of Him. It follows, therefore, that the effort to perform the pledge becomes by God's help a direct blessing to us, for God blesses those that worship Him.

To perform a vow we have to exercise our energies methodically and to a purpose; our capabilities, therefore, expand with the effort, and we are, so to speak, forced to grow in grace. None have a better control over their actions than those who force themselves to exercise that control.

On the other hand, failure will not count against us if it but precedes further effort. Remark Peter's terrible fall after his earnest pro-

testations of fidelity, then see his final success. The vow thus becomes but the means to the end.

Now as to the pledge of the C. E. Society.

It is a necessity to and one of its principal foundations, or in the words of Dr. Clarke, "The prayer meeting pledge honestly interpreted is a necessity to the continued success of C. E. societies." This is borne out by actual experience, for we have more than one example of societies in this city, re-organizing and adopting the pledge where they did not use it before, and never have I heard of a society dropping its pledge.

The objects of the pledge are these: 1st. The enunciation of our duties to God. 2nd. The remembrance of them. 3rd. The consequent fulfilment of them. 4th. The strength of the union of a number joined together for the same object.

Let us read this pledge.

"Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do; that I will pray to Him and read the Bible every day, and that, just so far as I know how, throughout my whole life I will endeavor to lead a Christian life. As an active member I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present at and to take some part, aside from singing, in every meeting, unless hindered by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. If obliged to be absent from the monthly consecration meeting I will, if possible, send an excuse for my absence to the society."

Now is there anything objectionable in this pledge when honestly faced? To my mind there is not.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength,

the burden is taken from us and placed on Christ, can we not trust Him? All we have to do is to do our best, He furnishes the strength and does the rest for us, and the pledge is accomplished.

The duties called for are those from which no honest Christian ought to shrink. They are what he ought to do anyway, and are only brought out in language that cannot be mistaken.

I know that the clause relating to taking part in the meetings is the stumbling block to many. Why is that? Have you forgotten the first clause? Can you not trust the Lord Jesus Christ to give you strength? Besides, you may by your example be deterring others from declaring for the Master. More than that, the meetings are not large and all are young like yourself, and if they were for any other purpose than a religious one, you, or most of you, would not be so shy. I have noticed this in the business meetings. Why there should be any difference I cannot see. Besides all this it will be easier the second time than the first, and Jesus, your Master, says: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God, but he that denieth Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God" (Luke xii. 8-9). "And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 27).

The society that looks to God for all blessings and strictly observes its vows taken voluntarily by each young person, cannot fail. Why? Simply because there is union first with God, and secondly among the members, who are all striving for the same object.

An army working without a definite plan must work poorly and is likely to fail, although, each detachment may be ever so well

drilled ; so a C. E. Society without the definite plan of a pledge must do work poorly at best, and is likely to fail although the members individually may all be good.

The object of the consecration meeting is to pledge and declare ourselves anew to Jesus Christ; it is the only meeting at which the progress of the society can be determined. It is the thermometer or gauge of its spiritual welfare. It should indicate where anything is wrong ; and this it can only do where the society has a pledge and the members are living up to it. Anything wrong can only be corrected after it is found out, and that should be done immediately, consequently the greater the necessity for finding out as soon as possible, therefore the greater the necessity to the welfare of a society for the pledge which assists so materially in accomplishing this object and of its faithful exaction from the members.

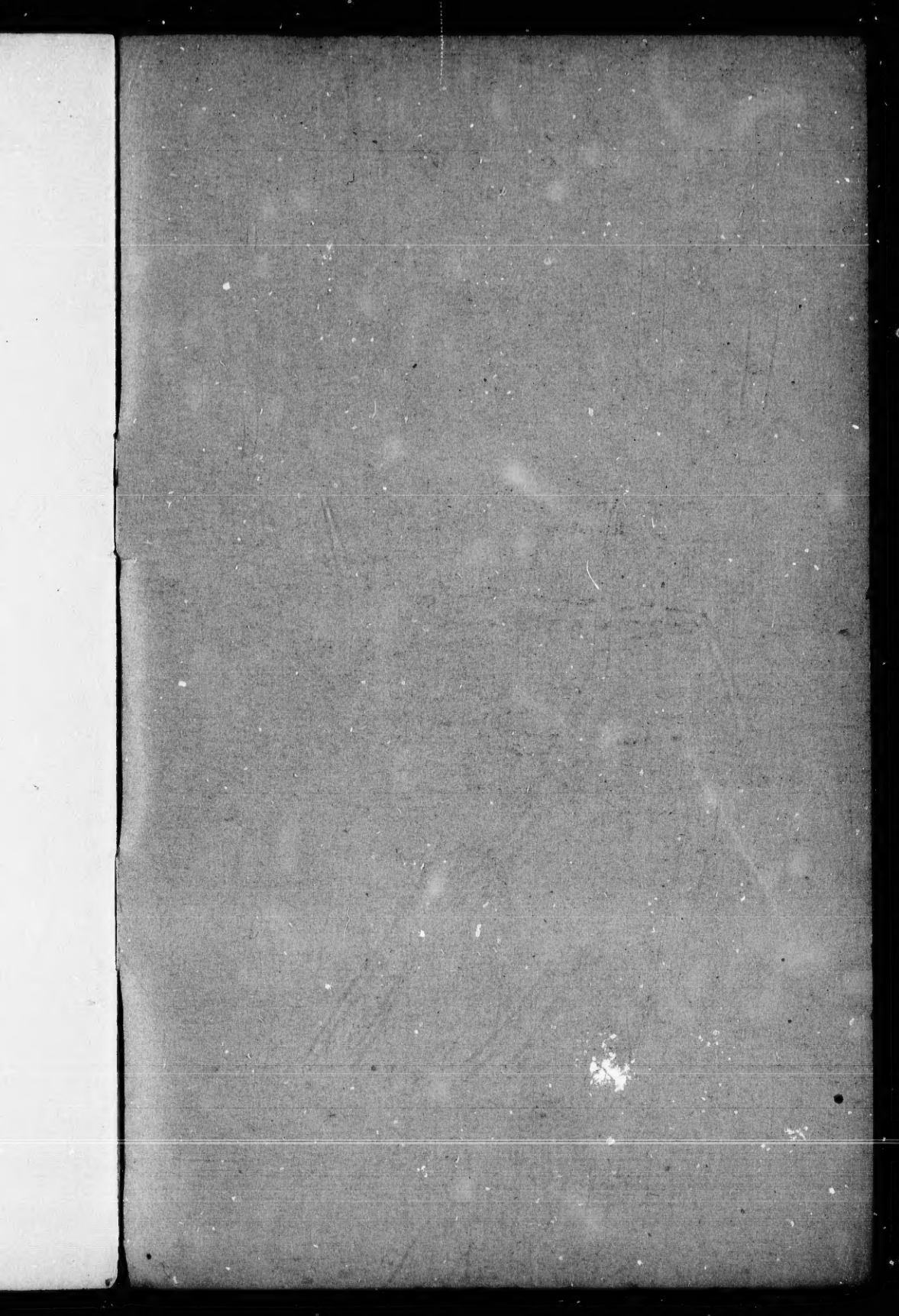
I, therefore, to sum up the whole, have established fairly and honestly :

1st. That the pledge is permitted by Divine authority.

2nd. That by the same authority it is a necessity.

3rd. That it is beneficial.

4th. That it is most decidedly necessary, useful, and beneficial to C. E. societies, especially in the consecration meetings for, the welfare of the society as well as each individual member. Let us by all means adopt the pledge in its strongest wording in all our societies of C. E., and see that it is carried out faithfully by all the members, and God will be with us in all our doings, and the Holy Ghost will inspire us for better work for the Master, for Christ, and the Church.



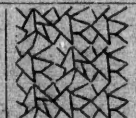


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